



News Release

Office of the Louisiana State Fire Marshal
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HAVE A SAFE FOURTH OF JULY Fireworks Safety Issues

Baton Rouge - Because death, injuries, and fires are frequent occurrences when untrained consumers light fireworks, the Fire Marshal's Office has joined with the National Fire Protection Assn. (NFPA), The International Fire Marshals Association (IFMA), The National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM), The American College of Emergency Physicians and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in urging families to attend **professional, public fireworks displays** this Fourth of July holiday. Attending a public fireworks display on the Fourth of July is a safe way to honor our tradition of independence, our shared values, and our hopes for a healthy future.

"Safe fireworks don't exist," said Fire Marshal Bella. "When things go wrong, they go wrong very fast, and often with disastrous consequences." **About half of all consumer fireworks-related injuries occur among children under the age of 15, with nearly two-thirds suffered by those under age 20. The highest injury rates were among teens, according to the Consumer Products Safety Commission.** Fireworks can result in severe burns, fractures, scars, lifelong disfigurement or even death. The thousands of serious injuries each year typically harm the eyes, head, or hands and are mostly reported in states, such as Louisiana, where fireworks are legal. **Even sparklers, which are considered by many to be harmless, reach temperatures in excess of 1000 degrees F.**

Eye damage accounts for **27.6%** of all fireworks injuries, according to AAP, and some of these injuries result in permanent blindness. Other common sites for injury are: extremities (**48.2%**), and head and face (**43.1%**). In all age groups, there were an estimated **9,500 injuries requiring emergency medical treatment, and 12 deaths in 1999 as a result of injuries associated with fireworks.**

Overall, there were nearly **24,200 fires** associated with fireworks use in 1999 alone, according to a recent NFPA report. On July 4th, fireworks cause more fires in the U.S. than all other causes of fire on that day combined. Wooded areas, homes, and even automobiles have become engulfed in flames because of fireworks. Fireworks-related fires have typically caused **at least \$17 million in property loss nationally** (not adjusted for inflation) in recent years. A substantial portion of the structure fire property loss due to fireworks typically involves bottle rockets or other fireworks rockets/aerial devices. These rockets can land on rooftops or wedge within certain structures and still retain enough heat to cause a fire. **"A family's home represents the work of a lifetime,"** said Fire Marshal Bella. **"Losing your home or having a family member seriously injured because of a fireworks accident would be disastrous. There are safer alternatives to using fireworks on the Fourth of July."**

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Public fireworks displays are one of those alternatives. Conducted by trained professionals, these displays are the smartest and safest fireworks alternative for everyone, because they are established under controlled settings and regulations. Clearly, fireworks are capable of devastating and fatal injuries. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), there are currently seven states that ban all consumer fireworks. Significantly lower rates of fireworks-related injuries and fires are seen in these states, according to AAP. "The fireworks banned in these states do not become safer when used in Louisiana where consumer fireworks can be legally purchased," said Fire Marshal Bella. **"I strongly urge you, the citizens of Louisiana, to avoid the hazards of consumer fireworks. Rather, attend a professional show, and have a happy and safe Fourth of July."**

TO THOSE CITIZENS OF THE STATE WHO DO INTEND TO PURCHASE AND USE FIREWORKS DURING THE UPCOMING HOLIDAY, MR. BELLA OFFERS THE FOLLOWING FIREWORKS SAFETY SUGGESTIONS:

- Always read and follow the label directions carefully
- Always have a garden hose or water bucket nearby for medical emergencies and/or to douse spent or misfired fireworks.
- Adults should always supervise fireworks activity.
- Fireworks should be placed on a hard, smooth surface prior to ignition. **NEVER** light fireworks in your hand.
- Quickly light one firework at a time, and move away quickly after lighting.
- Never point or throw fireworks at people, pets, cars, or buildings
- Keep fireworks away from small children.
- Do not alter or make your own fireworks.
- After displays, never pick up fireworks that may be left over. Fireworks that have been ignited and fail to immediately explode or discharge can cause injury, as they may still be active. Children should always tell an adult if they find fireworks rather than picking up smoking or charred fireworks themselves.

Concerning age requirements, Mr. Bella advised that state law prohibits anyone from offering to sell or selling fireworks to any child under the age of fifteen (15). The Fire Marshal adds that parents may be held liable for any damages or injuries caused by their children's illegal use of fireworks. Mr. Bella further advises that anyone found selling fireworks without a proper permit from the Office of the State Fire Marshal will be ordered to "cease and desist" operations until a proper permit has been obtained and properly posted. Fire Marshal Bella said that his deputies will be inspecting fireworks stands during the retail season to ensure they meet the minimum requirements for fire safety and registration.

"The few moments of pleasure consumer fireworks bring are not worth the risk of property loss, injury, or death. Avoid needless risks," said Fire Marshal Bella. **"The alternative of a professionally-run public display is, in every way, superior in spectacle and safety."**

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